

UMAD Memoir

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Several unique and unforgettable years in a constructive midlife adventure—how many people get the opportunity (rhetorical question)?

In 1981, tired of working for tenure in American academia, I grasped the straw of the University of Maryland's Asian program and found it to be—in the current parlance—a game-changer. I suppose the most remarkable personal advantage of my UMAD adventure was that it was very educational—for me, that is—and terrific fun! And we all can agree on the basics: a successful, socially constructive and congenial program providing educational opportunity to a worthy and often underserved student population.

In early 1981 as I was offered a position teaching political science, history and Asian Studies I was also ready and willing to review and upgrade the existing program in Asian Studies. I started teaching at Yokota In Term IV and began then to prepare a special adventure for faculty and students: a study tour to the People's Republic of China, which reflected my background in China studies. I remained in the program until 1985. What did it offer to an instructor? Great people to work with, great freedom of instruction within U of M's sensible guidelines. Not only travel—always adventurous and educational—but opportunities for scholarship and meeting with serious and motivated students, as well as Asian people and societies.

When I think back on this experience now, 40 years later, the memories usually come back in what might be called anecdotal form. Let's call them vignettes. Here's one to start.

Time: December 1982. Place: Beijing, the Beijing Hotel, about 7 AM. My wife (and co- study tour leader) and I are awakened by an alarmed hotel official. Someone has died! Yes, one of our tour group, a Department of the Army staffer in Tokyo, has had a heart attack (as it develops) and is dead in his bed. Definitely a crisis. Hotel employees and local police and medics appear. Later In a touch of absurdity I will never forget, one Chinese medic, having seriously observed the scene for five minutes, turned to me and said (in Chinese) "This man is dead!" Of course, there was much sadness and confusion. I called the American Embassy and informed them of the situation, which was in fact handled quickly and well by the Chinese authorities. I also briefly met with Ambassador Arthur Hummel. And the tour had to go on that day—led to the Great Wall by my wife and assistant leader Major John Newman. UMAD Director Julian Jones handled the connections with College Park and beyond. A bad beginning, perhaps, but this early study tour proved successful. Offering full credit, tour students did more than sightsee as we explored what was then just the beginning of US relations with post-Mao China. One high point was a stop at a Chinese university in Xi'an to establish permanent connections with Maryland.

Among the tour members was Neil Foley, English instructor at Misawa. The next chapter in the development of the UMAD curriculum involved sending both Neil and myself to open courses at the remote Indian Ocean US Navy facility on the small island of Diego Garcia, far from the usual East Asian

territory. Among other courses, Neil organized a theater performance—for credit—of the popular Broadway/Hollywood drama. “Mister Roberts”, linking a UMAD offering with our navy hosts. My memories of two terms on the island feature bicycle riding through the jungles and plenty of time at the beach. BTW decades later I learned that a cousin of my wife’s was running Special Forces training operations at the time in the same jungles.

In addition to helping develop Maryland’s Asian study tours, I was pleased to assist in other ways. For one, I recommended that the antiquated name of the program, “Far East Division” be changed to the more contemporary “Asian Division,” and this suggestion was soon accepted. In addition, I helped put together a new concentration (as majors were then called) in Asian Studies, and this too was readily approved by the academic leadership in College Park.

Of course, I remember with pleasure the UMAD faculty, area directors and staff of that period who worked so hard and well for the program. You were all great colleagues and friends. But I will only mention one name in particular: Emory Trosper, long-term stalwart of UMAD HQ. He made a long TDY trip to Diego Garcia involving formal inspection and liaison with the navy and proved to be a fine companion then and later. My best wishes to all former colleagues.

And I recall using the navy’s space available offer in Diego Garcia to fly from the island to visit Singapore for a weekend—a valued perk.

The wonders of the Orient always included food! That’s a whole subject in itself!

Among useful opportunities for UMAD faculty was of course local language instruction. I studied and used basic Japanese. I was able to put my Chinese skills to work during the China tour. (I didn’t venture as far as Korean).

I think it was in 1983 that I attended graduation ceremonies in Yokota. I had arranged for an old Harvard contact and well- known Asia scholar Ezra Vogel, author of *Japan as Number One*, then on a sabbatical project, to receive an honorary degree from Maryland.

And at Yokota there was always the bonus of viewing Fujisan in the western distance. In one term break I was able to offer faculty an onsite briefing on the Diet Library in Tokyo, foreshadowing my later move into academic librarianship. Tokyo bookshops were a great resource.

By the time came for me to spend a “re-entry” year at College Park, I had taught in Japan, Korea, Okinawa, Guam and Diego Garcia. The travel regimen was sometimes exhausting but always interesting and valuable. I have counted up more than 20 bases/locations where I taught. Local employees and contacts were always valuable.

In 1982, after a Korean winter, I was delighted to be assigned to warm Okinawa, but found much more there than mild climate. Life on and off base was civilized and interesting, a special take on Japanese culture, food and history mixed with an American military presence which offered comfortable quarters and an always useful Class 6 store and the PX—same in Guam, where I spent more than one term. One

unique feature in northern Okinawa was “Expo,” in the north of the island, the site of an earlier World’s Fair.

Some generalizations from my 1980s experience, hopefully still relevant almost 40 years later:
The University of Maryland Asian Division program has been socially constructive and successful for decades, offering good and unique opportunities to both faculty and students. The military provided a good basis for all operations. The quality of instruction was high. The students were generally good—some very good—and motivated by career factors. The quality of life for instructors was surprisingly high despite hard assignments. There were perks of various kinds, fascinating travel, an interesting and challenging teaching environment, and a lot of comradeship and fun! The quality of administration and faculty in my time was good to excellent; the faculty was valued and supported properly. The work offered challenges and fostered personal growth.

In 1994 on a library acquisitions trip to Asia I managed to visit UMAD HQ, where the annual faculty meeting featured a softball game (I got a single!). I was tasked with making a quick survey of the HQ library. I also visited Naha, and met with my old teacher at George Washington U., the late Dennis Doolin, then in charge of the UMAD program there. All was well

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